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The Low Layman

UPON

The High Layman ;

BEING

An ANSWER to that Part of *A Discourse*
of the Necessity of Publick Worship, and a Discovery
of some Mistakes and Miscarriages therein, which
relates to the DISSENTERS.

In a LETTER to a Lady.

In vacuo Solus Sessor Plausorq; Theatro.



L O N D O N :

Printed by R. Tookey, and sold by J. Roberts in
Warwick-Lane. 1716.

(Price Sixpence.)

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THE following Letter was writ some time since, when its Author had the Pleasure of a short Retirement in the Country, and with a Design to be made Publick; but upon his coming back to Town, his own Affairs giving a new Turn to his Thoughts, he was resolv'd to suppress it. Of this Opinion he continu'd, but at Length one of his Intimate Acquaintance having procur'd a Sight of it, he thought the close Friendship there was betwixt 'em, would be a sufficient Authority for his venturing to send it to the Press, tho' he did not thorowly acquaint

him with his Design. Accordingly, That Gentleman, who sets a Value upon Every Thing that comes from the same Hand, put it into Mine, to the end that I might Publish it; which I have now done, not in the least doubting but 'twill meet with as favourable a Reception, as I am told by Good Judges it deserves.



An ANSWER, &c.

Madam,

LAST Week I receiv'd your obliging Letter, as also the little *Tract* inclosed, which I have since look'd over, and am surpriz'd to hear that so mean a Performance should have any other effect on its Readers, (who you say too are very numerous) than that of drawing Pity from them on the poor obscure Author. But when you tell me that several Men in Black have recommended it, my Wonder begins to cease; since we have often, and particularly of late, experienc'd, That the Influence they have on the *Populace* is sufficient to make them believe *Black* is *White*, and *White* is *Black*, in the same Hour.

As I have always declar'd my self an Admirer of the *Fair Sex*, I should justly deserve their most severe Censure, did I neglect the least Opportunity of demonstrating that I am really so, by my Readiness to serve them: And I hope *You* will have no Reason to complain, when you find me even acting *out of Character*, in order to do it. As for my own Part, I shall think I have a much more lawful Call to the Press, than the Person I am speaking of, who, it seems, had no other than that of finding out a Method for the disposing of his * *Sunday Evenings and rainy Days*; whereas mine was purely Obedience to the Commands of a very virtuous and ingenious Lady.

* *Vide* The End of his Preface.

By

By this, I have given you to know, 'tis my Design to spend the best Part of a Day or two in your Service, and that by making some Remarks on the Pamphlet you sent me: But before I go any farther, give me Leave to say, I think it no otherwise worthy of so Publick Notice, than as *You* have honour'd it with a Reading, and as it will give *me* an Opportunity of making others as sensible as we are ourselves, that how fit soever the Writer of it might be for a *Churchwarden*, he was but badly qualify'd for an *Author*. This I think fit to mention *here* for the sake of the Man, whose Vanity I fear would else be apt to *swell* him so much at first Sight of my *Epistle*, that he would be in Danger of *bursting*, before he could read to the End of it.

Having spoke of a Churchwarden, I can't forbear taking Notice of the Blunder our *Discourser* has committed at his first setting out, even in the very Beginning of his *Preface to his Neighbours*; where he tells them (I suppose in order to let his Readers know what a valuable Man he was) that *since they have been pleas'd to chuse him Churchwarden, &c.* when 'tis notorious that the Parson only did it: And how far he has rewarded that Gentleman, for the Respect he shew'd him in the Choice, may be learnt from the Complement he makes him a little after, where he says, that *Observing in THIS PLACE a general Decay of Christianity, what through the casting off all Religion and the Fear of God, by some, and the misguided Zeal and superstitious Conceits of others, and the Indifferency, Indecency and Profanation of many; I know no better Way to discharge my Duty to God, to my Superiors, and to your Souls, than by putting this following Discourse into your Hands.* This is a most dismal Character of a Parish indeed! But 'tis probable the Parson of *W——y* may have too much good Nature in him to imagine this *Satyr* as grinning at himself; tho' you know it is an old Saying, *Like Priest, like People*, and nothing can be more natural than to suppose, from these Lines, that the *Minister* was very negligent of his Duty, and therefore our *Author*, tho' a Layman, was willing to supply his Deficiency,

Deficiency, by publishing a more edifying Discourse of his own. But be that as it will, if the *Clergy* can pick out no better Men among the *Laitie*, than such as our Author is, I am confident their Cause would be thought never the worse, if they made use of none of 'em at all to vindicate it.

You will observe, *Madam*, He has divided his Discourse into Three Parts, but one of which relates to the Dissenters, and that is the Second; wherefore I shall not concern my self with the other two, though if a Man had a Mind to be merry, 'twere easie to divert both himself and his Readers, not a little, with the Inconsistencies and Absurdities contain'd in them both: But as they happen to be committed in the handling of Subjects wherein we are all agreed, and as I am sorry that these should be manag'd by no better a Pen, I shall decline taking that Advantage of exposing him, especially since I see there will be so much Room to do it, in what more immediately lies in my Way. However there is one thing, which I think deserves not to miss of a short Animadversion, and 'tis towards the latter End of the Book. The Discourser having observ'd the *indecent and irreverent Performance of Divine Worship by some of the Establish'd Church*, and the great Scandal the same administers to Religion; in p. 53. he says, that 'Would all of our Communion worship God with that Degree of Devotion which the Holy Offices of our Church do naturally promote, and every where strictly command; I dare affirm, the most violent Dissenter, were he but honest, would be so far convin'd, as that *falling down on his Face, he would worship God and say, that God was in us of a Truth*. When before, in p. 49. he had own'd, that the Dissenters are *serious and devout in their Worship, and seem awfully affected with the Apprehension of the Divine Presence among them*. Now this being so, Why may not a Dissenter, according to the same Argument, dare affirm, that the most violent *Churchman*, were he but honest, must be so far convinc'd, as that *falling down on his Face, he would worship God and say, that God was in them of a Truth?*

But

But it may be our Author, who in this *Piece* pretends to do more than all his Predecessors have done, will likewise pretend to alter the eternal Nature of Things, and affirm, That the same which are good and commendable in the one, become the reverse when practis'd by the other.

I shall now, before I return to my principal Design, take notice of a great Mistake the Discourse lies under, as well in the *Introduction*, as throughout his whole Discourse; which is this; He would fain insinuate into his Readers, that because 'tis a Duty to worship God as publickly and conjointly as possible, therefore all ought to conform to the *National Church*. Now any one but our Discourser would have drawn a quite different Conclusion from thence, and say, That therefore Men ought not to add to the Word of God, which is the only Rule of our Faith, and Guide to our Practice, by imposing such Things as are acknowledged to be Indifferent, and not Necessary to Salvation; but we should bear with, and forbear one another in Love, and endeavour to accommodate Matters of Religion to every one's Content and Satisfaction; not giving Scandal to, and laying Stumbling-Blocks before Souls for whom Christ died. This we find was the Opinion of the pious and learned Bishop *Tayler*, Bishop *Davenant*, Bishop *Hall*, Dr. *Potter*, Dr. *Stillingsfleet*, and many other celebrated Divines of the Church of *England*, as may be seen in the *Protestant Reconciler*, Ch. 7. to which I refer you: And finding I am like to have an Occasion for speaking more largely on these Things hereafter, I will for the present only insert an Observation of one of the most Judicious Men above-nam'd, to this purpose: * There

' is nothing (*says he*) in which the Primitive Church
' deserves more to be imitated by us, than in that
' admirable Temper, Moderation, and Condescension,
' which was used in it towards all the Members of it.
' It was never thought worth the while to make any
' standing Law for Rites and Customs that had no

* Dr. *Stillingsfleet's* Pref. to *Iren.*

• other Original, but Tradition ; much less to suspend
Men her Communion, for not observing them.'

Our Author begins Pag. 31. thus. 2. *I come in the next Place to shew the dangerous Mistakes of those who forsake the Communion of the Church, upon pretence of Conscience, and for fear of Sin.* This is very kindly done of him, indeed ! The Dissenters will be extreamly obliged to him for spending his *Sunday Evenings* and *Rainy Days*, if he could after so doing, be able to convince them of their *Mistake*, and put them into the right Road of Salvation : But what if at length it should appear, that he is in the wrong himself ? If so, I doubt he will one day find, he has made but ill use of his Time, in taking so much Pains to lead others into the same Misfortune. We shall try this anon, and at present will however fancy that he *thinks* himself at least in the right.

He proceeds : *And here I foresee I shall say such Things as will seem sharp to some Persons ; but there are many severe Truths which are sometimes necessary to be spoken ; and such Patients as cannot bear the searching of their Wounds, often miscarry under more gentle Methods of Cure.* He has a strange Foresight with him ! For my part, I don't foresee any Danger the Dissenters are in of being made the least uneasy at any thing that will drop from his insipid Pen ; it is much more likely they will be made to laugh by it ; for all I fear is, that we have to do with a *Quack*, and that sort of Mortals are more famous for *diverting* than *curing* their Patients. What gives too much reason for this Suspicion, is, that he has so great a Conceit of himself, and at the same time so mean an one of all others ; insinuating as if no body had yet thoroughly search'd our Wounds, but that now he design'd to do it to the purpose with his own most dextrous Hand. However we'll see what he can do ; I wish he may not cut and slash where there is no need.

But (says he) God is my Witness, I have no Intent to anger any Man. I know not what his *Intent* may be, but I dare say none will be anger'd by him unless

it be his best Friends, for his meddling in Matters he knows so little of. *And for that Cause shall confine myself to such Arguments only as seem necessary for clearing the Point in hand.* I am glad to hear we are like to have some *clear Arguments*; 'tis what is seldom to be met with in very considerable Authors of his Party, when they are writing on this Subject; but, 'tis like, *ours* may have more to say than all that have gone before him: However I don't see that he is more *confin'd* than his Brethren; for I know not of what use Arguments are that do not tend to the *clearing of the Point in hand*, at least I can assure him, where I meet with such, I have never the good Manners to take any notice of 'em. *Avoiding* (quoth he) *as much as can be, every thing that will exasperate*; as I intimated before, he need not be in much Pain about that. He adds, *For I take it as a Rule, that those who endeavour to please God, and save their Souls, ought to be treated with the greatest Compassion, and most tender Regard, whenever they mistake in the Means of attaining it.* His Rule is very good, and what the Dissenters would be extremely willing to practise towards him, were they really perswaded he *endeavour'd to please God, and save his Soul*: But, by the way, it seems to be no small Reflection on the Justice of the *Almighty*, to say, that after a Person has done his utmost to please him, and to procure his own Salvation; that he should, notwithstanding, miss of it at last; which is no more than being *mistaken in the Means of attaining it*. He continues, *And the better to avoid any Harshness in this Discourse, I shall move every thing that looks like Disputation.* This, how little soever it *looks like Disputation*, looks very much as if he had a mind to fly from his Promise he made a few Lines above, which was to *use Arguments*; and how it is possible to write to the purpose on a disputable Point, and not write any thing that looks like Disputation, I can't well understand; and what reason he has to * *hope it may have a better Effect than*

disputing generally hath, and prove a more powerful Way of Conviction to all well-meaning Persons, than the most unanswerable Reasons have hitherto done, is still more to be admired; nor is it easie to be accounted for, unless he fancies the Dissenters are like a Flock of silly, yet harmless Sheep, which are more affrighted at the impotent Yelpings of a little Puppy dangling after 'em, than they are at the manly Voice of their Driver.

Having now made a very grave Apology, he with as much seeming Seriousness falls to the Work, but alas! Has already superseded the Necessity of my attending him any longer; for on a sudden, he drops his Design of using Arguments, and those which he promis'd should be novel and *indisputing ones*, are now become none at all; for he declares, * *He will not argue the Necessity of Church-Communion, but will apply himself to the Consciences of these Men.* 'Tis very civil of him however, to allow that this is the easiest Way to work upon the Dissenters; for some of their Adversaries will scarcely admit them to have any Consciences, and therefore are for convincing them after a *Shorter Method*; as if the great *Creator* of the Universe who made nothing in vain, and who gave to every Man a reasonable Soul, endued with noble Faculties, could be content for one Part of the Species to forbid the other the Exercise of 'em; and that those should have a Power to teach these how to worship their *Common Benefactor*, in the same Manner that Dogs and Horses are taught to obey their Masters! But the Way that he applies himself to the Consciences of these Men, is by bidding them *in Order to discover the Sincerity of their Hearts, Seriously to ask themselves the following Questions.* If you will promise not to laugh, *Madam*, I'll keep my Countenance too, if that be possible, whilst talking to so sad a merry Gentleman: And to humour him a little, because I know he loves to be thought a Champion for the Church (tho' I doubt he is *mistaken in the Means of attaining that Character*) I

will speak to each of his Questions, but must first let him know, that I could have put him Fifty in less Time than I have been writing this; and when I had done, should be far from thinking I had offer'd one Argument in Favour of the Cause I espoused.

But let us hear what a Knack our Author has at dealing with the Consciences of People. The First Question the Dissenter is to ask himself is, * *Whether he did ever thoroughly and impartially consider, That it is a very great Sin to make Divisions and Separations in the Church of Christ?* O sad! What the very First Question too? Why *Dicky, Dicky*, you have spoil'd all now; this looks as if you still retain'd some of your old Principles, and were willing to wound another Sort of People thro' the Sides of the Dissenters; I wish you do not make some Folks suspect the Sincerity of your Conversion. — Pardon me *Madam* — But surely if our Author had not form'd this Question on a *Rainy Day*, when the Weather had an evil Influence on his Brain, he must needs have known, that it would much better fit *those* than *these*; and the best that can be said for it is, that 'twas an *Afternoon's Production*. But hoping he may read this on a serene Day, and when his Head is in better Order, I will do no other to convince him of his *unlucky* Mistake, than in his own way, apply my self to his Conscience, by putting him a Case; which I hope he will permit me to do for once, seeing he has so often taken that Liberty with other People. Suppose then a Parcel of Gentlemen had agreed amongst themselves to meet once a Week at *Whatly*, on Purpose to drink a Health to King George, and Prosperity to the present Happy Establishment, but had made a Whimsical Order too, that none should be admitted into their Society, except such as could not only write *good English*, but also be able to demonstrate any Proposition in *Euclid*; and it happen'd that there was one Mr. *S—te* of the same Place, as loyal a Man as any of

'em all, who had a great Desire to enjoy their Conversation, but by Reason either of the Neglect of his Parents in his Education, or thro' his own want of Genius, he was not capable to perform either of the Things prerequir'd, and therefore could not be admitted: However, he bore this Disadvantage as easily as he could, and took all Opportunities of shewing his Loyalty in other Company; but notwithstanding that, a certain Member of this haughty Club met him one Day, and told him *he was a Jacobite*, to which he answer'd, *no, he was not, for he lov'd his Majesty King George as well as himself*; but t'other reply'd again, *that can never be, for if you did, you would come to our Club*. Now I ask our Author, *in order to discover the Sincerity of his Heart*, whether he thinks this honest, tho' illiterate Gentleman can be blam'd, as wilfully absenting himself from the Club; or whether the Fault will not rather lie on them who requir'd such previous Term, as were no wise necessary to his being a very worthy Member, and good Companion. I believe our Author would not be long in determining this Point, and I'll engage, if he will be ingenuons, he shall find as little Difficulty in that which gave occasion for my mentioning it.

But let us hear him again, * *Now (says he) the Sinfulness hereof (i. e. of causing Divisions and Separations in the Church of Christ) appears not only from those many strict Commands the Gospel gives us to Love and Union, too many to be cited in this Paper, but also from those terrible Denunciations the Scriptures give against Strife, Seditions and Heresies, that they are such Works of the Flesh as exclude Men from the Kingdom of God.* The Dissenters are very sensible of the Sinfulness of causing Divisions and Separations in the Church of Christ, and therefore wish that those who are guilty, would consider of it more than they seem to do. As for themselves, they (according to the Commands of the Gospel) endeavour to cultivate Love and Union as much

as possible, and would be very glad if all others did the same. They profess to love all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity, of what Persuasion soever, and particularly that of the Church of England, with whom they are willing to commune *Personally*, but can't do it upon any other Terms than those of our *Saviour*, whom they esteem as sole Legislator of his Church. They think with one of the Fathers, * *That it is an unworthy Thing for Christians to condemn one another, for those Things which do not at all commend 'em to God: And are entirely of Opinion in this matter, with the incomparable Archbishop Tillotson, who in his Discourse on the Parable of the Ten Virgins, observes the charitable Decorum which our blessed Saviour seems careful to keep in all his Parables, in which he always supposes that among those who enjoy the Gospel, and make Profession of it, that the Number of those who are sincere, are equal to those that are not. ||* ' And whether, *says this good Man*, this be particularly intended or not, it may however be thus far instructive to us, that we should be so far from lessening the Number of the Christians, and from confining the Church of Christ within a narrow Compass, so as to exclude out of its Communion, the far greatest Part of the *Professors* of Christianity; that on the contrary, we should enlarge the Kingdom of *Christ* as much we can, and extend our Charity to all *Churches* and *Christians* of what Denomination soever, as far as Regard to Truth, and to the Foundation of the *Christian Religion* will permit us to believe and hope well of them; and rather be contented to err a little on the favourable and charitable Part, than to be mistaken in the censorious and damning Side. Yet the Dissenters can't conceive that the Commands of Love and Union which are to be met with in the

* *Indignum est propter ea quæ nos Deo neq; digniores, neq; indigniores possunt facere, alii alios vel Condemnemus vel judicemus. St. Aug.*

|| *Tillotson's Works, Vol. I. p. 364. Fol. Edit.*

Gospel, do extend so far as to oblige them to be of any Religion, meerly because it has the Authority of Men on its side, although it be recommended under the most specious Pretences; nor do they think the manly, plain and spiritual Institutions of *Christ* stand in need of any external Pomp or Show, to set forth the Truth and Excellency of them. They are not for imposing their own Fancies and Opinions on others, but modestly desire Leave to worship God according to the Direction of his own Head. By taking their *Saviour* for their Guide, they are sure of going aright, and of pleasing him; which they are not sure to do in complying with the Humours, and following the Devices of frail and fallible Men.

As to the Denunciations which the Scriptures give against Strife, Sedition, and Heresy; our Author is very base, or rather foolish, in applying them so particularly to the Dissenters: For tho these are Crimes which may be met with amongst all sorts of People, yet it would be no difficult Task, to prove, that they are less rampant among them, than some others. And I would ask our Author, what more warm and uncharitable Disputes have there been than betwixt some of the *Episcopal* Church? witness the Contests about Convocation-Privileges, the Distinctions and Scuffles about High Church and Low, with innumerable others both formerly and of late. That there have been *Seditions* within the Pale of the same Church, is but too well known: I need only mention the saucy and turbulent Carriage of certain Presbyters towards their Bishops; on some Occasions asserting that they are *Jure Divino*, and much their Superiors; nay, that they are vested with a Power in their several Diocesses, not inferiour to that of absolute Monarchs, tho at other times they will speak as diminutively of them, and beg leave to be understood to mean such Bishops only as they themselves approve.

And then what more absurd and ridiculous, as well as wicked and profane Notions were there ever broach'd by Men, than have been taught by some in

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Communion with the Establish'd Church? Has our Author forgot, or did he never hear that Mr. *Dodwell*, Dr. *Hickes*, Mr. *Lesley*, and Dr. *S—t*, are, or were all of that Church? To give him a Taste of the three former Writers, (because 'twould be too tedious to quote their Words at length) I will refer him to a little Pamphlet, call'd, the * *New Catechism*; and as for the latter, 'tis enough to say, he was the Author of the *Tale of a Tub*. I could cite many other living Instances to this purpose, were it necessary; but I think it sufficient to have prov'd, at least, that Heresies are not to be met with *only* amongst the *Dissenters*. And our *Discourser* is mistaken, if he thinks that a bare Separation from an Establish'd Church will denominate such a one a *Heretick*, for that is taking for granted, that a Religion must be undoubtedly *Orthodox*, because 'tis Establish'd; which is to suppose, that the Civil Magistrate has a peculiar Gift of making the same Opinion true or false, by his suffering or denying it to be professed.

He proceeds, || *This being so* (says he) *one would think, that those who affect to be call'd Men of tender Consciences, should not so hastily engage in such a Separation, until they had thoroughly examin'd the Reasons, and were upon good Grounds satisfy'd of the necessity thereof.* Now he poorly begs the Question again; for the Dissenters say, that as they are Men of tender Consciences, (with which Term he *affects* to twit them) so they did not hastily engage in such a Separation, but did it upon good Grounds; and as they fully examin'd the Reasons, so they are fully perswaded of the Necessity thereof: And I am apt to think, that if our *Discourser* had so well consider'd what it is to set up for an Instructor of others, he would have seen it Necessary to have read and learnt a little more himself, before he had so *hastily* turn'd *Author*, which would have saved much of his own Reputation, as well as me of risking mine, by considering of him as such.

He goes on, *For he who seriously considers, must know, that it is a Sin to separate without a just Cause, from a National Church, as well as to joyn in an Idolotrous Worship.* I need not answer this any other Way than by turning it upon him: The Dissenters have seriously consider'd, and therefore believe it is as great a Sin to Conform to a National Church, when there is a just Cause to the contrary, as to joyn in an Idolotrous Worship; and as he says presently after, *an upright Man is equally careful to avoid every Sin.* But I must here tell him once for all, that a Church is a *voluntary* Society of Christians, met together in order to serve God, and perform all the Publick Duties of their Religion; and whether it be, or be not *Establish'd*, is no Argument with me why I shall, or shall not enter my self a Member of it. As 'tis by my own Faith and good Works through the Merits of Jesus Christ, I am to be saved, so I may make Choice of what Methods I think most likely for the attaining that End. And since the same Directions to Heaven are alike given to all, and another Person cannot answer for me, if I miss of finding it at last, 'tis absurd and ridiculous to imagine that he has a better Right to draw me after him, than I have to take him along with me; or that every one is not at his Liberty to go that way which he thinks best; it being never supposed that any Body would willingly go the wrong, or seek the Destruction of his own Soul.

If then, says our Author, *it be considered that the far greater Part of our Dissenters are incapable of examining the Reasons of their Separation; since the Things in Controversy are above their Capacities, &c.* This is certainly one of the pleasantest Writers that ever was; a little above, he is angry with the Dissenters for engaging so hastily in a Separation, before they have examin'd the Reasons thereof; and here he says they are incapable of doing it, *the Things in Controversie being above their Capacities.* So that the poor Dissenters are sure to incur this Gentleman's Displeasure both ways; if they alledge that they have diligently examin'd the Things

in Controversie, 'tis making themselves Judges of matters that are above their Capacities; and yet if they do not, 'tis as bad, for then they hastily engage in a Separation, without examining the Reasons thereof. I wonder when he'll complain of any one for too hastily *Conforming*, or for pretending to understand the things in Controversie afterwards; I presume he thinks the Act of *Conforming* will atone for any Mis-Conduct of that Kind.

But I would fain know of him what those Things are, that are above our Capacities: Are they such, without the Knowledge of which, we can't be sav'd? Surely he won't say so; for that were to contradict a Maxim in Christianity, viz. *That every Thing may be known by a Good Man, that is necessary to Salvation*: If then these Things are not necessary, what need we be in Pain for the Want of 'em? And tho' our Author is pleased to speak so meanly of the Capacities of the Dissenters, yet as God bestows his Gifts in common, both to the good and to the bad, 'tis much the Dissenters may not be suppos'd to have their Share; And he himself will allow that some of 'em have, which it may be he does for his own sake; and I should wonder else how *He* came to be so good a Judge of the Things in Controversie, it being well known that he was once a Dissenter himself; and I can scarce be so uncharitable as to think he afterwards blindly went over to the Establish'd Church without a previous Examination; for that were to act contrary to his own Doctrine, which is * *That there is a Necessity for being very well assur'd that the Terms of Communion are sinful, before we should presume to separate*. Now altho' he there speaks of a *National Church*, the Rule must as strongly hold with Respect to any other, which we happen to be brought up in: For, as he says soon after, *the Want of such an Assurance would involve us in the Guilt of Schism, should the Cause of our Separation be never so justifiable*. Besides, if the Dis-

* *Discourse*, p. 34.

courser will have it, that the Dissenters on Account of their weak Capacities are oblig'd to conform implicitly to the *Church of England*, those of the *Romish* Communion will soon perswade him, that the same Reason will equally or more strongly oblige as many of them to go over to that of *Rome*, where there is what no other Church pretends to, an *Infallible Guide*; which, indeed, by his manner of Reasoning looks but too likely to be the Goal our Author is hastening to.

I think I have now fully answer'd every thing contain'd under this Question, and shall only observe farther on it, that the *Discourser*, in order to possess his unwary Readers with a favourable Opinion of what he has advanc'd, places several Texts of Scripture in the Margin, as if he had Them on his side; which whoever will have the Curiosity to look into, must immediately be convinc'd, that they do not at all relate to the matter in Hand, much less prove what he would seem to bring them for. As this is a manifest perverting of the Word of God, I think my self concern'd, as I go along, with more than usual Seriousness, to caution him of doing so for the future. He would do well to remember, that it contains eternal and unalterable Truths, and each Part of it has always the same Signification, and must be understood in the same Sense; nor does any one Part contradict another; therefore That Man is guilty of a vile and abominable Practice, who will make use of it to support his own indigested and absurd Notions.

The next Question that he bids the Dissenters ask themselves, is, * *Whether their Separation from the Establish'd Church be upon true Principles of Conscience?* To which I answer: One would think the Sufferings and Hardships which the Dissenters have so often undergone, and the Disadvantages they still labour under for the *Testimony of a good Conscience*, should be so many undoubted Proofs of their being sincere in their

Pretensions, that there could have been no room left for such a Question as this now-a-days : But since our Author is so forgetful of all these, or else so ill-natur'd as not to take any notice of 'em, I would ask him, Upon what Principles he thinks they do separate, if not upon those of Conscience ? Either he knows some other Principles on which they separate, or he does not ; if he does, why hasn't he nam'd 'em ? If he does not, Charity obliges him to think they do it on those of Conscience. He proceeds, and says, *A full Examination of this Matter is highly necessary, since a Mistake therein will be of fatal Consequence to your Souls.* If this be true, I would advise him to look to it also ; for, to use his own Simile, with a little Alteration, * As he who swears the contrary to what he knows, is perjured, tho he swears Truth ; so he who conforms to a National Church when he is perswaded in his Conscience that he ought not to do so, tho in itself it be no Sin to do it, doth not conform out of Obedience to the Law of God, but in compliance with the Humours of Men, and consequently is guilty of such a Sin as unrepented of will || *plunge him into that State which deprives Men not of the Means of Salvation only, but of Salvation itself.*

‘ ** For, says he, as a Conscience well directed, is
 ‘ indeed beyond the Controul of any Earthly Power,
 ‘ having the Authority of Heaven to plead in its Justification, and therefore neither will, nor ought to
 ‘ yield or comply to the Commands of Men, wherever they contradict the Commands of God : So on
 ‘ the other hand, a bare pretence of Conscience, in
 ‘ disobeying our Governors, either in Church or State,
 ‘ and thereby disturbing the Peace of both, or either,
 ‘ is such a high Provocation to God, and an Affront
 ‘ to our Superiors, as calls for severe Punishments in
 ‘ this Life, and more dreadful ones in that to come.’
 I agree with him, that a Conscience well directed is *beyond the Controul of any Earthly Power* ; but then the

worst of it is, our Author, I fear, will not count any one *well directed*, 'till it chime in with such and such Notions as he himself approves, which is making his own Conscience the Standard of other People's; whereas every one must stand or fall by his own. I allow too, that a *bare Pretence of Conscience*, &c. is a *High Provocation to God*, and as it will, I doubt not, meet with dreadful Punishments in another World, so it *deserves* the severest one in this: But the Question is, How our Governors will be able to know when a Man acts the Hypocrite, and when not? If they should punish a Man as barely pretending Conscience, and he should happen to have a Conscience *well directed*, then they would punish the Guiltless, and so heap Coals of Fire on their own Heads; but if he should really deserve it, yet as 'tis what they could not be assur'd of, they would nevertheless be Guilty of exceeding the Bounds of their Commission, and acting without their Jurisdiction, which is no less than setting aside the *Authority of Heaven*, and making themselves Judges of Matters which are *beyond the Controul of any Earthly Power*.

But now our Author is going to set up for a *Critick* too, as well as he has already done for a *Casuit*; and although the Attempt be beyond my Expectation, the Success is not so; for how indifferently he performs, will appear very soon. *And that many*, says he, *who talk much of Conscience, and would be thought to govern their whole Lives by its Direction, are yet very ignorant in the Nature and Office of it, seems evident from the improper and impertinent Use they make of the Word Conscience*; Why what Use do they make of it? Oh truly they are such Boobies as to say (what to be sure nobody in the World would besides themselves) * *I think in my Conscience, I believe in my Conscience, or my Conscience tells me it is thus or thus; when they mean no more by it, than only its their Opinion or Judgment that it is so or so.* This is a bad Business indeed! In Order

* *Discourse*, p. 36.

therefore (says this knowing one) to give such Men a more perfect Understanding herein, I shall attempt to shew them what Conscience is, and about what it is employ'd. Well, let us hear him. Now Conscience (says he) is a Power or Faculty in Man, whereby having compar'd his Actions with the Laws of God, he passeth a Judgment on them accordingly, approving them when they agree with, and condemning them when they contradict the same.

Surely this Man was born to blunder, and did I not know him to be my Countryman, I should have taken him for a Teigue, by his Manner of Writing. One Moment he falls unmercifully upon the Dissenters for their great Ignorance, and the very next is guilty of the same thing himself, which he thought entitled them to that Invective; for then he quarrell'd with them for meaning by Conscience, that their Judgment is so and so; and now in defining Conscience, says, 'Tis that Power or Faculty in Man, whereby having compar'd his Actions with the Laws of God, he passeth a Judgment, &c. Now I allow, strictly speaking, * Conscience is no more than the Judgment which a Man passes upon himself, as he is subject to the Laws of God; or according to Mr. Lock, || A Man's own Opinion of the Pravity or Rectitude of his own Actions. But yet I can't conceive that the Dissenters are the only Persons who in common Talk, use it in a more lax Sense. Suppose, for Instance, any one should desire me to tell him sincerely, whether I thought the little Book before me was written by Mr. S——e, or not, and after having examin'd his Qualifications, and also the Book it self, and then comparing them together, my Judgment should determine me in the Affirmative, and I should say, That tho' some were of a quite contrary Opinion, I verily believ'd in my Conscience, he alone was the Author of it, and that a certain Clergy-

* *Conscientia Humana est Judicium Hominis de semetipso, prout subijcitur Judicio Dei.* Guil. Amessii de Conscient. p. 1.

Essay on Human Und.

man of the same Name was a Man of too much Sense to have any Hand in it; adding withal, that *on my Conscience* I thought whilst he was writing it, he had much better been saying his Prayers. Would any one laugh at me (at such a Time) and say, I had made an improper and impertinent Use of the Word Conscience? Surely none but a very *Impertinent Fellow* would do so.

But then after all, this Definition of Conscience is as much in Favour of the Dissenters, as could well be desired; for if it be a Faculty in Man, whereby he is able to compare his Actions with the Laws of God, and afterwards to pass a Judgment on them accordingly, why then the Dissenters having this Faculty, have likewise a Right to make Use of it, and maugre all the Threats and Sophistry of wicked and cunning-Men, ought to act according to the last Determination of their Judgment. For, as he says, *by pleading Conscience, they plead God's Authority*. And as it would be sinful in any one, to desire it, so a Good Man can no more resist the Convictions of his own Mind, than he can refuse his Assent to any Proposition that is Mathematically demonstrated to him. From whence it followeth, that if a Dissenter has compar'd that Action of his, of separating from the Establish'd Church, with the Laws of God, and finds it to be agreeable thereto, he is oblig'd to continue in his Separation.

And the Case which our Author brings of *Peter and Paul*, who tho' they were commanded by the Rulers of the People, *not to speak at all in the Name of Jesus*, chose to obey God (who had before commanded them to *preach the Gospel to every Creature*) rather than Man, will not by any Means do to prove, as he would have it, that the only Excuse there can be for disobeying the Laws of our Civil Governors, is an express Law of God to the contrary. For as Christ has laid down and left behind him a Rule for his Church to go by, so he has given a strict Charge to all his Followers, not to *

add to, or diminish from it. Now if we do either of these, we are guilty of disobeying the Commands of Christ; and therefore, tho' there be not a particular and express Command in the Gospel, not to do so or so, which our Civil Governors have requir'd of us, yet if the doing it should appear to be the least derogatory to this Rule of our *Saviour*, it is sufficient to justify us in refusing to obey them. Besides, as I hinted before, our Civil Governors (and happy it is for us! we have now such as are far from desiring it) have nothing to do with the Consciences of People, nor indeed with their Actions, any farther than they relate to the Peace and Safety of the State; and that the Ecclesiastical Governors he speaks of, have no more, is evident, not only for that they receive their Power from the former, and therefore can't have a greater than those from whence they deriv'd it; but also because the Laws made by the Rulers of any one Church, can only be obligatory to such as are Members of it. So that as the People I am justifying, are Members of particular and distinct Churches of their own, they are no more bound by the Laws of any other, than the Subjects of *Great Britain* are by the Laws of *France*. And that the Dissenters have Churches among themselves, I shall take for granted, 'till our Author will please to prove that they want some things that are essential to their being so, which he has not here so much as essay'd to do. But the Inference he draws from the Example above, is this. *From hence (says he) it appears, that Conscience is concern'd in all Cases where God hath given us any Law or Precept, but not elsewhere.* In answer to which, I hope I have already said enough. ' And, continues he, to pretend Conscience for refusing those things which God hath no where forbid, or for doing what he hath no where commanded, is in Effect saying, *The Lord saith, albeit he hath not spoken.* I am very much of this Gentleman's Mind, when he tells us, that *to pretend Conscience in those Things which God has no where commanded, is in Effect Saying, The Lord saith, albeit he hath*

not spoken, and therefore think those worthy of great Blame who pretend Conscience for being so tenacious of unscriptural Traditions, as to exclude all from their Communion who refuse them; which looks like being exact in the Tything of *Mint, Anis, and Cummin*; whilst they neglect the weightier Matters of Religion. But if he had been acquainted with the History of our Reformation, he must have known that the *Reformers*; those Glorious Standers-fast in that Liberty where-with Christ had made them free, pleaded Conscience for *refusing* several Ceremonies which were *no where* expressly *forbidden* in Scripture; and their doing so, they did not think was *saying the Lord saith, albeit he hath not spoken*; nor was it teaching for Doctrine either the Commandments or Fancies of Men: But they declared the Reason why they did it, was, because they thought those Things were an adding to the Words of the Book of God, against which so dreadful a Doom is denounced. And therefore our Author has here apply'd those two last-mention'd Portions of Scripture as awkwardly as he has done several others before.

* Having now (to use his own polite Phrase) *fully digested this Question*, we will be so kind to ourselves, as to ask another, viz. 3. *Whether in very Deed we do believe that Communion with the Establish'd Church is sinful?* To which I answer, that some of the Dissenters do in *very Deed* believe so; but since he has been pleased to set apart his Fourth and Last Question purposely for their use, I shall reserve what I have to say on their Behalf till we come to it; and at present speak something in Defence of another sort of Dissenters, who tho they do not in *very Deed* believe that Communion with the Establish'd Church is sinful, yet are *afraid* that it is so, and therefore think they ought to avoid it. These are call'd Men of *Scrupulous Consciences*, in whose Favour even Dr. Sacheverell himself

has spoke thus much, ' * I would not, *says he*, here
 ' be intended to cast the least invidious Reflection up-
 ' on that Indulgence the Government has condescend-
 ' ed to give 'em, which I am sure all those that wish
 ' well to our Church, are very ready to grant to
 ' Consciences truly Scrupulous.' Now this zealous
 Gentleman, and the rest who wish so well to the
 Church, to be sure, would never so readily give in to
 such an *Indulgence*, if they really thought those Men
 guilty of a Sin in separating; for that were to encour-
 age them in it. So that the Question before us seems
 to be impertinent, since 'tis allow'd, that if a Man's
 Conscience be but *truly Scrupulous*, he may warranta-
 bly separate. And a *Writer* well known among the
 Learned, discoursing on this Head, says, || that ' then
 ' a Conscience may be said to be Scrupulous, when
 ' the Judgment of the Understanding is possessed with
 ' an anxious Fear, lest the thing which we fancy to
 ' be good, should prove evil, or *vice versa*. Now
 ' (*says he*) when such Scruples are founded on probable
 ' Arguments, the Action is to be *suspended*, till they
 ' can be taken away, and cleared up, either by the
 ' Force of Arguments, or by the Authority of wise
 ' Men. And then he takes notice of a good Remedy
 ' which *Cartes* prescribes against Fluctuation of Mind,
 ' and the Bitings of Conscience which precede an Ac-
 ' tion, *viz. To accustom ourselves to the forming of cer-*
 ' *tain and determinate Judgments of all things that offer*
 ' *themselves to us.* But (*continues he*) we must observe
 ' further, that these Judgments ought to be drawn
 ' from genuine and solid Science, or from Doctrine
 ' of the Laws of Nature, and from the Christian Re-
 ' ligion, purg'd from the vain Additions of supersti-
 ' tious Men.

But our Author goes on, and says, *This, however it*
looks, is not a needless Question, since 'tis observable, that
many Men seem Christians at large, and can either go to

* *Vid.* his Sermon at St. Paul's, p. 19.

|| *Puf. De Jur. Nat. & Gent. Lib. 1. Cap. 3. §. 9.*
 Church,

Church, or to any other separate Congregation, &c. I don't understand what he means by Mens seeming Christians at large, except he would banter those Men for having a *larger* degree of Charity than others, which I am sure he has no reason to do; for if it be so, 'tis not only *observable*, as he saith, but likewise worthy of *Imitation*; since 'tis a very good Token of their being better Christians too, the *Apostle* having told us, * that *without Charity all other Graces are of no Signification*: And I know not how they can better discover that they have it, than by occasionally joining in the Service of God with all People whom they think good Christians, tho they do not entirely agree with them in what they think the right *manner* of doing it. But then, says the *Discourser*, *one would in Charity think, that when they come to Church, they do not think it unlawful so to do; and if they may lawfully come once, why not always?* To which I answer, Suppose, *Madam*, you were to visit a Relation who had for Dinner a Dish of Meat which he extreamly lov'd himself, as well as his whole Family, but what was not so grateful to your Taste as another you used to have at Home; but yet for fear of giving Offence, and to let them know that you did not angrily despise it, you were willing for once to content yourself with such a Dinner; does it follow that because your Stomach would once take it on these Considerations, therefore you ought always to dine upon the same Dish? Or that therefore it would be unmannerly to have any other? Why thus it is with these People; they will, to testify their Love, now and then content themselves with the Service they meet with at *Church*, but since they know they have a Right to worship God in such a manner as they think most proper, had rather chuse, for a constancy, to do it after that which is used in their own Congregations.

The *Discourser* adds: *For if it be lawful, says he, to communicate with the National Church, it must certainly*

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

be sinful to separate from it, since nothing but sinful Terms of Communion can justify a Separation from an Establish'd Church. Now, tho' this only relates to a few of the Dissenters, and is what was included too in the Answer made to the former Part of this formidable Argument, yet as I have Reason to think, some worthy Gentlemen, whose Piety I daren't call in Question, are particularly aim'd at by it, I would advise our *Discourser* to consider moreover, that Occasions may happen, whereby it may be put into the Power of such Persons to do more Service to God and their Country by Conforming, and then they may lawfully do it and be very consistent with their Principles too. For tho' 'tis true, considering the matter *simpliciter*, they had rather communicate with their own Churches than than any where else, yet if such Opportunity offer, the same Reason which fixt their Choice before in separating from the National Church, will have equal Force now in prompting them to conform to it; and they think they ought at all Times to deny themselves of any Pleasure or Conveniency, for the Sake of the Publick Good.

What I have already said, to prove that the Civil Magistrate was never invested by God Almighty, with such a Power as our *Discourser* attributes to him, is more than enough to invalidate his saying, that *nothing but sinful Terms of Communion can justify a Separation from an Establish'd Church.* And 'tis as evident as well from what he has said herein, as from the Concessions I am told he has often made in Conversation, that according to his own Notion of a National Church, he is an *Occasional Conformist* himself, and that of the worst Sort to; for if, thro' the contingent Alteration of Supream Magistrates, the Constitution of the Church should be subverted, and alternatively chang'd from *Episcopacy* to *Presbytery* never so often, this Gentleman is always ready to change his Religion too, because he'll be obedient to his Superiors forsooth. Now there is another Sort of People in the World, who carry the Argument still farther; according to whom, as it was

was impossible that ever Christianity could have been establish'd at first, so all those who were concern'd in extirpating what was Wickedly paum'd upon the World for it, were no better than so many impious Rebels and Schismatics, and all *Protestant Churches* in *Europe* are no less guilty, as long as they continue so; and therefore are oblig'd with the most Hearty Repentance, to return to that Mother of Harlots, the Grand Whore of *Rome*. But God be praised! the very Reverse to such Doctrine as this, seems now likely to prevail, both abroad and at Home; which as it affords all true Protestants a Glorious Prospect of being made happy in the present, as well as a future World, so it fills their Minds with the most excessive Joy, and their Hearts with the loudest Thanksgivings, to him who has the disposing of all Hearts, and who in a Moment can open the Eyes of whole Nations, as he once did, in that Space of Time, those of a persecuting and cruel *Saul*.

But, says our Author, * *there are some who say, that they do indeed believe our Communion is sinful; and for that Reason they neither can, nor will joyn therein.* Well, and what has he to say to such then, since he himself grants, that sinful Terms of Communion will justify a Separation from an Establish'd Church. O why he very gravely *entreats* such to ask themselves this other Question, viz. 4. *How they came by such a Belief?* An Arch Wag this; he is resolv'd to stop their Mouths for the present however: He is not content that a Man is come Twenty or Thirty Miles to see him, but e'er he will venture to embrace him as a Friend, he must needs know of him, How he came to find the Way? And this (says he) is a very necessary Question, *because Men are apt to put Cheats and Fallacies upon themselves.* Just as if I should go into the Shop, and say to a certain Wool-Comber, who had given ocular Demonstration of his being well vers'd in that Trade, by getting Ten or Twelve Shillings a Week

at it, Hark ye honest Friend, 'tis true, I see some of your Performances here, but I must tell you, Men are apt to put Cheats and Fallacies upon themselves, and therefore I would entreat you, before you earn one Penny more, to ask your self this Question, viz. *How you came to be so good a Comber?* Or, as if I should say to the same Man, who afterwards appear'd under a more Publick Character, by writing a Book; Sir, you are pleas'd to say Indeed, that you compos'd this, and afterwards order'd it to be printed, but for my Part I don't think you can be satisfy'd of the Truth of it, unless you will first ask your self, How you came to be such a shrewd young Fellow as to be able to do it?

But I am perfectly asham'd to dwell any longer here; nor will any thing I am able to say make it look more ridiculous than it does already of it self; and therefore I must acquaint my Brother *Layman*, that tho' it is not impossible but he might be half awake when he stated his other Questions, he could be no otherwise than dreaming, whilst he put this. For when I am ask'd, Whether or no I do believe that Communion with the Establish'd Church is sinful; before I can give a requisite Answer, I must consider the Arguments there are both for and against it, and when I have done so, form a Judgment accordingly. But after I have given my firm Assent on one side or the other, and do in Truth believe, what need I ask my self a new, *How I came to do it?* It must be confess'd indeed, we are liable to Mistake, and therefore to be the more sure, we should make a Reflection upon these Things again and again; but this is before we firmly believe, and is comprehended under the foregoing Queries.

So that you see, *Madam*, 'tis impossible for me to advance any thing under this Head, without repeating what he occasion'd me to say before, which (tho' I am willing enough to oblige the *Discourser*) I shall be more merciful both to you and my self than to do. Yet I can't chuse but say, it much surprizes me, That he should here so vehemently urge (as he has
before

before often insinuated) that the present Dissenters act in direct Disobedience to the Laws of their Governors, * by separating from the Establish'd Church; since it was impossible for him not to know that there is a Law in being, commonly call'd *The Toleration Act*, which gives Liberty of Conscience to all Protestant Dissenters; and therefore either he must be stupid to an uncommon Degree, or else, like some other pretended *Loyalists*, he reckons this and all the rest of the *Statutes* made since the late happy *Revolution*, to be of no Obligation; if this last be the Case, I heartily pity him, but hope he and all his Brethren, will e'er long be made to *Feel* the contrary. And they may now consider, to their great Mortification too, that His present *Majesty*, the most Politick, and Wisest as well as Greatest and Best of *Princes*, hath on many Occasions been pleas'd to declare his Affection for those People, whom some Men would represent as deserving the severest Treatment, placing Them amongst the Number of his most dutiful Subjects; and has more than once given his Royal Word, that he will not fail to maintain them in their just Rights and Privileges.

Thus, *Madam*, I think I have now plainly made appear, that the noisie Triumph with which some Men abounded on Account of this *Piece*, could proceed from no other Reason, than that the Author of it was once a Dissenter himself, joyn'd with the Consideration of his being a *Layman*; and therefore I am in Hopes that I have now punctually perform'd my Promise, and answer'd your Request, which I have endeavour'd to do with as little Prolixity as possible. If what I have said, prove of that use to some People, which you was willing to make me believe it would, I shall very much rejoyce: And tho' it may displease others that are bigotted, of what Sort soever, it shall not give me an anxious Thought, because 'tis Satisfaction enough to me, that I know I am writing to one

* *Vide P. 40, and 41.*

who is not bias'd to any Side or Party, but judgeth of every Thing by that Reason God Almighty hath given her.

I must add further, that 'twere well if there were no Occasion for Disputes of this Kind between *Protestants*, but that we could be content to let every one serve God according to his Conscience; and make it our Business to promote Love and Good Works, accounting those the best Christians, and therefore the best Churchmen, who lead the best Lives. For I am sure, we ought at this Juncture especially, to leave off fighting one against another, and heartily joyn our Forces, and be vigilant and active against the *Common Enemy*, who we find are ready with insatiable Mouths, whenever we give them an Opportunity, to devour us all; From the Barbarities and Cruelties of whom, as well as from their Nonsensical and Idolotrous Religion, *Good Lord deliver us.*

I have now only to assure you, that I do with no less Readiness than Sincerity, acknowledge my self,

Madam,

Your most Obliged

And

Most Humble Servant

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